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Summer Jobs and Beyond program seeks additional employers

By MIRANDA DAVIS
Recorder Staff

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MONTAGUE — With more than 120 kids employed last year, the Summer Jobs and Beyond program is returning this summer seeking more employers in the area.

The program, which is funded through a nearly \$2 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, helps match youth in Montague, Orange and Ware with jobs in the area.

The program is meant to be a win-win for participants, according to Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board Director Patricia Crosby.

Crosby said the youth are given a chance to learn new skills and get exposure to a working environment while getting paid. The employers get a chance to train someone in their field and build their future workforce. The grant covers the salaries and workmen's compensation.

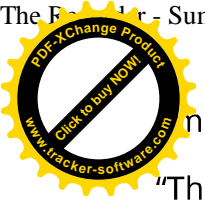
The youth employed range in age from 16 to 18 and the jobs are eight weeks, starting in July.

Crosby said the best jobs are ones where students can learn more about the industry, rather than filing paperwork. She said the intent of the program is to help expose young people to an industry and give them a chance to work with others and build necessary job skills. Crosby said it is helpful if the job description is clear and the employer is willing to help teach and guide the employee.

She said the employment board looks for good matches of interests and skills between the youth and the business. The hope, Crosby said, is that the summer placement could turn into a full-time job at either the employer's business or a similar one in the area.

"A summer job can be a summer job or it can be a building block for the future," she said.

Crosby said many employers are concerned with a lack of readiness in young



employees.

"This is their opportunity to remedy that by giving them a shot to find a role," she said.

Eleven grants were awarded nationwide. The grant focuses on Montague, Orange and Ware because the youth unemployment rate is 7 percentage points higher in those towns compared to the national average. The unemployment rate is 33.6 percent for ages 16 to 19 and 23.4 percent for ages 20 to 24, according to the Franklin County Unemployment Board.

Part of the program involved putting counselors in the schools in those towns who would help identify students appropriate for the program.

Crosby said program organizers have about 10 to 15 job sites in each of the three regions, but they are looking for more. She said they would prefer to have about 30 in each town, but said that could include the surrounding area for youth with access to transportation.

Current employers are Ja' Duke, Shanahan Construction, Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority, Upinngil Farm and the Gill-Montague Regional School District.

"We are so appreciative of these employers," Ricia Elwell of Community Action said. "Especially the small businesses who are willing to invest their limited time and resources in mentoring a youth. It's a strong statement of how much they care about the future of the community."

If you are interested in becoming an employer, contact Lee Fournier-Lewis, employer liaison 413-834-5411 lfournierlewis@communityaction.us, or go to communityaction.us/youth and click on the link to fill out a worksite application.

Reach Miranda Davis at 413-772-0261, ext. 280 or mdavis@recorder.com